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Research Report: Exploring what religion means to people.

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Abstract: The specific values of religious activities to persons of Fundamentalist and Kindly Beliefs types are empirically explored. Religion is found to have much stronger and more tightly defined meaning for the former than for the latter group. Implications for understanding the meaning of religion to humans, for exploring the possibility of developing a “meta religion” that could unite members of both orientations, and the importance for these findings for political activity are discussed.

Introduction:

Previous factor analytic studies by the author have revealed that religious beliefs as embodied in the major world religions fall into two factors, Religious Fundamentalism and Kindly Religious Beliefs, which are strongly related to antisocial and pro-social political attitudes respectively.¹ Religious Fundamentalism, which is endorsed by approximately 5 percent of Americans studied, is positively and strongly correlated with the psychological trait of warmongering. It is negatively correlated with endorsement of human rights, a positive foreign policy and sustainable policies and programs. In contrast, the Kindly Religious Beliefs orientation is endorsed by about 89 percent of Americans studied. It is negatively correlated with warmongering and positively with endorsement of human rights, positive foreign policy and sustainable programs.

Because religious beliefs are related to political attitudes, including warmongering, it is important to understand the specific value religion has for people and how a “meta religion” might be crafted to help unite peace-loving people of different specific faiths and sects from around the world.

Studies of religious and human rights values by the author have documented greater agreement than disagreement between various groups of persons studied, implying that there may be a core of shared values that can be capitalized upon to foster cooperation between varied groups.

Philosophers, such as Ian Barbour, who specialized in the relationship between religion and science, have offered explanations as to what religion means to people.

For example, Barbour states that science helps people understand the real, publically observable, world while religion helps them understand the spiritual world. He states:

“Science asks about the causal relations between events ... while religion asks about the meaning and purpose of our lives.”ⁱⁱ

Referring to four different styles that characterize philosophies of science, he describes the *Independence* typology as including the belief that “Science asks how things work and deals with objective facts; religion deals with values and ultimate meaning.”ⁱⁱⁱ

However, he gives no indication that either his opinion in this regard or that of other religious philosophers is based on thorough empirical studies, asking people what specific personal meaning they find in religion and science respectively. While Barbour begins the Introduction to his referenced book with a few snippets of public opinion data, none of his remaining material implies that philosophers base their many varied theories about what meaning religion has for people upon detailed surveys of people. Philosophers apparently quote other philosophers in detail, but rarely ask the subjects of their theories, the citizens of nations, what they actually think and believe. What theologians want people to believe is not necessarily what they *do* believe. And there certainly are a wide variety of beliefs propounded by theologians representing many different major world religions and specific local sects.

What meaning citizens find in religion can be explored by empirical study, via approaches that might be termed “religious psychology”. Questionnaires can explore in detail what meaning people find in religion and if there are differences between groups or types of people.

The present study was undertaken as an initial exploration of the following questions:

1. What meaning or value do people find in religion?
2. Does the meaning and value for Fundamentalists differ from that of Kindly Belief types of persons?
3. Are there people, who are comfortable with the idea of a meta religion, one that might unite people of different faiths around the world? If so, what proportion of people are? What traits characterize them? Do fundamentalists differ from kindly beliefs types on this issue?

Method.

A questionnaire was created to ask persons how strongly they agree or disagree with each of 127 statements in 5-point Likert scale format. The items covered

religiosity, religious fundamentalism, kindly religious beliefs, and ways religion can have personal value, including the general value of religion, the value of church activities, prayer, and socializing, explanations of the origin of the world, causality, and free will, definitions of God/god, guidance with personal problems, the relationship between religion and science, and ideas about causality. Four items assessed interest in universal religious beliefs and services.

The questionnaire was first administered to 46 community college psychology students for class credit and study feedback for a learning experience. They ranged in age from 19 to 39 and in education from 12 to 17 years. 24 percent were males. Then the questionnaire was completed by 29 Unitarians from a nearby community. They ranged in age from 49 to 89, in education from 13 to 23 years, and 41 percent were males.

Results:

Community College Student Study:

General findings:

Scores on several scales were computed. Some scales were created in the process of data analysis. The scales were these:

Religious Fundamentalism. 17 items. Details about this religious and scale, the Kindly Beliefs scale and the Religiosity scales described below are available in a manual available at the author's web site.^{iv} This measure correlates strongly with Altemeyer's Religious Fundamentalism scale. It reflects tendencies to believe religious scriptures literally, that there is only one true God and that those who think otherwise are wrong, that authority is to be respected without question, that people and nations should compete and that God punishes wrongdoers.

Kindly Religious Beliefs. 13 items, reflecting attitudes of cooperation, kindness, forgiveness, helpfulness, flexible thinking, tolerance of other religious beliefs and sects, etc. People should cooperate. God takes many forms for different groups of people around the world. God is forgiving of wrongdoers. We should be kind to others and other nations, helping them rather than dominating them.

Religiosity. Four items reflecting devotion to prayer, church services, etc. In other studies by the author this scale has correlated strongly with Fundamentalism but not Kindly Beliefs.

Value of religion. 51 items from 84 of the present study items asking about the personal value or meaning religion has to persons. These 51 items reflect a variety of beliefs that cluster together as a meaningful factor or trait.

Universal Service. 4 items reflecting interest in religious services and thinking about a universal type of religious service, Ameta religious@ issues.

The basic statistical properties of these scales in the study of community college students are as follow:

Basic Statistical Properties of Primary Measures for Student Sample

<u>Scale</u>	<u>%>3.5</u>	<u>Mini- mum</u>	<u>Maxi- mum</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Alpha reliability coefficient</u>
Relig. Fundam.	4.3	24	65	42.9	9.47	.89
Kindly Religion.	89	32	65	53.0	6.70	.80
Religiosity	20	4	20	9.20	4.80	.89
Value of Religion-51	33	57	249	152	53.2	.97
Universal Service	89	8	20	14.4	2.9	.61

4.3 percent of the persons in this study were of the Fundamentalist religious orientation (mean item scores of 3.5 or higher across the 17 items in the scale). 89 percent were of the Kindly Religious orientation.

An initial step of data analysis was computing scores for and running Bivariate Pearson Product Moment correlations between the first three scales, above. Then data analysis, to be discussed below, led to creation of the last two scales. Correlations between age and gender and the other variables were basically insignificant. Years of education correlated significantly with Religious fundamentalism, -.41*. Persons with less education were more likely to hold fundamentalist beliefs.

Correlations between the major variables were then run with and without controlling for age and education, with some slight differences. Correlations are presented in the table below, controlled for age and years of education.

Trait	Rel Fun	Kindly Rel	Religiosity	Val-51	Uni-4
Relig. Fund.	1.00				

Kindly Relig.	-.04	1.00			
Religiosity	.55**	.33	1.00		
Value of Religion-51	.71**	.31	.83**	1.00	
Universal service -4	-.15	.34	.33	.33	1.00

By row, these were interpreted to mean:

Religious Fundamentalism and Kindly Religious Beliefs are independent of each other (-.04) for this group of persons. Holding one orientation gives no clue as to whether a person will hold the other.

Religiosity is rather strongly related to fundamentalism: fundamentalists see themselves as *areligious*. Persons of the kindly religious beliefs orientation are unlikely to. Put another way, fundamentalists see themselves as going regularly to religious services and praying, and think of themselves as *avery religious*. Persons of the kindly beliefs type do not. For them, personal religion does not hinge on these rituals.

The cluster of 51 items measuring religion having personal value for a believer tends to be held very strongly by fundamentalists and persons who see themselves as very religious, but not consistently by persons of the kindly beliefs orientation. To get a detailed sense of these values, the items that reflect them are presented shortly.

The idea of a meta religion, of universal religious services, is not strongly related to the other traits, but a more reliable measure of this tendency might reveal what is suggested by the present data; persons of the Kindly Beliefs orientation appear to be more likely to endorse universal religion ideas and services (.34) than are Fundamentalists (-.15).

Specific Findings.

What Religion Means to People.

Factor analysis of the 86 items in this questionnaire inquiring about the personal meaning of religion yielded essentially one primary factor. 51 of the religious meaning items correlated strongly and significantly with this factor. The few items that correlated negatively with this factor were reverse-scored. Then these 51 items were used to as the Value of Religion-51 scale.

Correlations between Religious Fundamentalism and these specific items consistently showed strong correlations in the direction expected. However, there were usually insignificant correlations between these specific items and the Kindly Beliefs trait. The only two exceptions uniquely identifying those of the Kindly Beliefs orientation were tendencies to read spiritual writings and meditate about spiritual issues, and a tendency to believe that human behavior, thoughts and feelings are partially caused by one's own free will and choices.

Thus, the item data of greatest interest is that for the specific items loading heavily on this Value of Religion scale. These items help reveal the workings specifically of the mind of the Fundamentalist. They are presented in the table below, with factor loadings. Items with positive loadings are ones with which Fundamentalists are likely to agree. Fundamentalists are likely to disagree with items of negative loading. Omitted items did not have strong loadings.

Questionnaire Item Loadings on Value of Religion Factor

<u>Loading</u>	<u>Item</u>
.66	5. I believe in a supreme supernatural being of only one form.
-.62	6. The idea of a supernatural being or beings, such as a God or gods is not of much interest to me.
.67	7. I get comfort through or from the kind and loving members of a religious group I belong to.
.76	8. I get comfort from religious services I attend.
.55	9. I enjoy social contact with other religious group members.
.75	10. Religion provides me an opportunity for me to provide services to other members of my religious group or community members that gives me a sense of feeling needed and appreciated.
-.75	11. I don't think religion provides me much of any value at all.
.86	12. Religion provides me much of value on a regular basis.

How important are each of the following as aspects of church activities you participate in? (Positive loading means "important").

.59	13. Reminders from church leader(s) to be a good person.
.70	14. Statements of encouragement and comfort from church leader(s).
.69	15. Reminders from sermons, hymns, etc. to feel humble before a supernatural being.
.66	16. Explanations from church leaders about how to understand and react to current events, such as community disasters or problems, national problems, world problems.
.81	17. An opportunity to pray and ask for things, support and comfort that I need.
.68	18. An opportunity to sing or enjoy listening to hymns

How important (valuable and meaningful) are each of the following aspects of religion to you in your personal life?

.72	19. Prayer or meditation by myself.
.75	20. Prayer or meditation with others, such as saying grace at mealtimes.
.61	21. Reading religious or spiritual writings.

- .57 22. Thinking and meditating about spiritual or religious topics.
- .77 23. Attending religious or meditative services.
- .66 24. Attending other religious activities, such as teaching religious classes, a study group, fund-raising event or play.

How important is each of the following for you personally as to what religion provides you that you find helpful...

- .81 25. An explanation of how the world began.
- .83 26. An explanation of how life on earth began.
- .82 27. An explanation of how the universe began.
- .78 28. An explanation of what will happen to me after I die.
- .83 29. An explanation of the meaning or purpose of my personal life, as by giving me goals, helping me discover or clarify goals, etc.
- .81 30. An explanation of the meaning or purpose of human life in general.
- .83 31. Answers to questions about free will.
- .65 32. An explanation of how supernatural beings are defined.
- .69 33. An explanation of my relationship to such a being or beings.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following items?

Religion provides me helpful...

- .81 34. Guidance in handling death.
- .74 35. Guidance and strength in handling intense or chronic personal problems.
- .79 36. Guidance in handling unpleasant feelings and emotions, such as depression, anger, fear and guilt.
- .78 37. Guidance and strength of willpower in handling addictive urges.
- .83 38. Guidance and strength of willpower in handling temptations, such as for sexual indiscretions, theft, cheating, etc.
- .55 39. Rather than religious guidance, I would prefer mental health counseling or psychotherapy for help in understanding and dealing with personal, family, and emotional problems.
- .84 40. Rather than religion, I prefer the findings of science to explain how the world and life began.

What are your thoughts and opinions about the relationship between science and religion?

- .78 51. Religion is more important than science.
- .61 52. Science is more important than religion.
- .67 54. Science is better than religion as a source of information about how the world works.
- .60 55. Religion is a better source of spiritual and social comfort and guidance than science.
- .66 56. Psychotherapy and counseling is a better source of personal, social and emotional guidance than religion.
- .63 57. I believe the universe is about 13.7 billion years old, as the sciences of astronomy and physics explain.
- .67 58. I believe that such scientists are wrong and that the universe is only 5,000 years old, as stated in the Bible.
- .72 59. I believe that dinosaurs lived for about 165 million years and died out about 65 million years ago, as science explains.

Opinions about definitions of God:

God is...

- .79 67. ...a human concept, created by humans.
 .65 68. ...a supernatural being that created itself or was created by some force beyond itself.

The power of the supernatural.

- .59 72. God, (a supernatural being), causes everything to happen.
 -.72 74. Nature, without any God or gods involved, causes all physical world things, such as the movement of the planets, volcanic eruptions and storms, to happen.
 -.60 83. The weather is caused simply by nature, independent of a supernatural being=s influence.
 -.64 84. Some things, such as clouds, can be beautiful without anybody or a god or God designing them to be the way they are.
 .64 85. Because a flower is beautiful, God had to design it rather than it developing simply by natural evolution.

Endorsement of Universal Religious Services.

The specific endorsement tendencies of Religious Fundamentalists compared to Kindly Religious types is further evident in the correlations between these two traits and the five questionnaire items specific to a universal religious services. This data is presented below.

Correlations between Religious Belief Orientations and Universal Religious Service Ideas

R.Fun	K.Rel	
.07	.02	91. I believe each person in the world should adhere only to his or her own preferred local religion and religious practices, not those of other faiths or cultures.
-.36*	.51**	92. I believe each person in the world who has religious interest should be encouraged to think about the welfare of all humans everywhere, even in the future.
-.05	.16	93. I am curious about what religious beliefs and activities may be common across persons of all countries and religions, such as enjoyment of sermons or other guiding talks by religious leaders, and enjoyment of relating to other persons of faith.
-.10	.48**	94. I would be comfortable with my personal religion including one service each month or so devoted to a theme of universal human concern.
-.34*	.23	95. I like the idea of each church, synagogue, mosque, etc. holding one service each month or so that is of a universal nature, practiced in the same general form by people in all faiths everywhere in the world.

In general, this data seems to reflect a more positive attitude about a universal religion among Kindly Belief types than among Fundamentalists. Thus, more Kindly

Belief type persons probably can be expected to support the idea of universal religious services and other efforts toward a universal, meta-religion.

Regarding frequency of endorsement levels, the percentage of these 46 students who strongly agreed, agreed and half who were neutral is given in the table below.

% Endorse	Item #	Item content.
22	91	Adhere only to one=s own local religion.
78	92	Think about the welfare of all others.
71	93	Curious about common religious beliefs.
57	94	One service per month of universal concern.
61	95	Universal service once each month.

Thus, we see in general a majority of this sample of persons seems to endorse the notion of a universal perspective in religious thinking and practices. The majority endorse the welfare of all humans. The majority also endorse the idea of a universal religious service based on common beliefs and practices once per month.

Unitarian Study.

A second study was conducted using a sample of 29 Unitarians from a nearby community. They participated in return for personal scores on the scales used and for a guest lecture about the study findings and related issues.

Basic Statistical Properties of Primary Measures for Unitarian Sample

<u>Scale</u>	<u>%>3.5</u>	<u>Min.</u>	<u>Max.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>KR-21 reliability</u>
Relig. Fundam.	0	22	51.0	33.4	6.2	.84
Kindly Religion.	97	39	65.0	59.1	6.2	.90
Religiosity	45	4	20	13.0	3.0	.56
Value of Religion-51	4	66	179.0	115.7	29.9	.98
Universal Service	89	12	20	16.6	2.2	.60

Zero percent of the persons in this study held the fundamentalist religious

orientation (mean item scores of 3.5 or higher across the 17 items in the scale). This contrasts to 4.3 percent of the student sample. 97 percent were of the Kindly Religious orientation compared to 89 percent of students. 4 percent endorsed the Value of Religion items, compared to 33 percent in the student sample. 89 percent endorsed universal religious services, the same percentage as in the student sample.

The reliability coefficients were computed by the Kuder-Richardson formula for convenience.

Correlations between these variables are presented in the table below, controlled for age and years of education.

Trait	RelFun	KindlyRel	Religiosity	Val-51	Uni-4
RelFun	1.00				
KindlyRel	-.66**	1.00			
Religiosity	.16	.20	1.00		
Val-51	.56**	-.17	.80**	1.00	
Uni-4	-.52*	.58*	.15	-.13	1.00

By row, these were interpreted to mean:

Religious Fundamentalism and Kindly Religious Beliefs in this group are negatively related (-.66**). Being higher on one is associated with being lower on the other.

Religiosity in this sample is unrelated to variations on fundamentalism and the Kindly Religious orientation (.16 and .20).

The cluster of 51 items measuring religion having personal value for a believer tends to be held by persons higher on fundamentalism (.56**) and persons who see themselves as very religious (.80**), but not consistently by persons of the kindly beliefs orientation (-.17).

The idea of a meta religion, of universal religious services, is in this sample confirmed in the direction hinted at in the student sample: Fundamentalists tend to eschew universal services (-.52*), while those of the kindly religious orientation endorse such services (.58**).

Other Measures of Δ What Religion Means to Me@.

Factor analysis of the personal value of religion items yielded essentially the same primary factor as in the student study. The two groups were then combined and factor analysis performed again on the sample of 75 persons. 43 items loaded rather strongly on this factor. Many were the same as for the 51 items in the first study. The 18 most strongly loading items, all with loadings of .70 or higher, constituted another briefer measure of this personal religion meaning dimension. Correlations revealed general equivalency between these various scales, as indicated in the last three columns of the table below.

Correlations between measures for a combined sample of
74 persons, students and unitarians.

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Rfun</u>	<u>KRel</u>	<u>Religi- osity</u>	<u>Univer- sality</u>	<u>Per-51</u>	<u>Per-43</u>	<u>Per-18</u>
Rfun	1.00	-.42**	.17	-.45**	.65**	.69**	.70**
KRel		1.00	.33**	.58**	.00	-.04	-.10
Religiosity			1.00	.30*	.58**	.49**	.45**
Universal.				1.00	.03	-.01	-.06
Per-51					1.00	.99**	.96**
Per-43						1.00	.98**

The items in the 43-item personal religious value scale again reveal the thinking characteristic of religious fundamentalists but not consistently characteristic of persons of the kindly religious belief orientation. The brief 18-item scale provides a convenient tool for research purposes. These items are presented below, with correlations between the two basic religious orientations. Those with asterisks are the 18-item scale. Notice that for most items the correlation with fundamentalism is rather strong but for the kindly beliefs orientation rather weak, not significant or tending in the opposite direction.

In items 11 and 12 we see similar values, indicating that the kindly beliefs orientation is as valuable a form of religion to those who hold it as the fundamentalist orientation is to them.

Personal Religious Value Item Correlations with
Religious Orientations

<u>Fund.</u>	<u>Kindly</u>	<u>Item content</u>
.59**	-.04	5. I believe in a supreme supernatural being of only one form.
-.41**	-.02	6. The idea of a supernatural being or beings, such as a God or gods is NOT of much interest to me.
-.28*	-.25*	11. I don=t think religion provides me much of any value at all.
.27*	.28*	12. Religion provides me much of value on a regular basis.
.35**	.08	13. Religion is important to me for providing reminders from church leader(s) to be a good person.
.21	.15	14. Religion is important to me for providing encouragement and comfort from church leader(s).
.57**	.01	*15. Religion is important to me for providing reminders from sermons, hymns, etc. to feel humble before a supernatural being.
.48**	.04	*17. Religion is important to me for providing an opportunity to pray and ask for things, support and comfort that I need.
.31**	.09	19. Religion is important to me for providing prayer or meditation by myself.
.39**	.12	20. Religion is important to me for providing prayer or meditation with others, such as saying grace at mealtimes.
.59**	-.17	*25. Religion is important to me for providing an explanation of how the world began.
.61**	-.17	*26. Religion is important to me for providing an explanation of how life on earth began.
.60**	-.19	*27. Religion is important to me for providing an explanation of how the universe began.
.60**	-.20	*28. Religion is important to me for providing an explanation of what will happen to me after I die.
.27*	.22	29. Religion is important to me for providing an explanation of the meaning or purpose of my personal life, as by giving me goals, helping me discover or clarify goals, etc.
		30. Religion is important to me for providing an explanation of

.30**	.21	the meaning or purpose of human life in general.
.39**	.11	*31. Religion is important to me for providing answers to questions about free will.
.55**	-.14	32. Religion is important to me for providing of how supernatural beings are defined.
.52**	-.14	*33. Religion is important to me for providing an explanation of my relationship to such a being or beings.
.31**	.04	Religion provides me helpful ... *34. ...guidance in handling death.
.33**	-.01	*35. ...guidance and strength in handling intense or chronic personal problems.
.24*	.13	36. ...guidance in handling unpleasant feelings and emotions, such as depression, anger, fear and guilt.
.54**	-.09	*37. ...guidance and strength of willpower in handling addictive urges.
.64**	-.09	*38. ...guidance and strength of willpower in handling temptations, such as for sexual indiscretions, theft, cheating, etc.
-.74**	.26**	*40. Rather than religion, I prefer the findings of science to explain how the world and life began.
.24*	.11	48. From my religion I would like more and better guidance about how to handle weekly personal problems and worries.
.60**	-.23	*51. Religion is more important than science.
-.37**	-.09	52. Science is more important than religion.
-.53**	.10	54. Science is better than religion as a source of information about how the world works.
-.32**	.01	56. Psychotherapy and counseling are a better source of personal, social and emotional guidance than religion.
-.56**	.20	57. I believe the universe is about 13.7 billion years old, as the science of astronomy and physics explain.
.63**	-.13	58. I believe that such scientists are wrong and that the universe is only 5,000 years old, as stated in the Bible.

-.61**	.13	*59. I believe that dinosaurs lived for about 165 million years and died out about 65 million years ago, as science explains.
-.62**	.02	*67. God is a human concept, created by humans.
.57**	-.13	*68. God is a supernatural being that created itself or was created by some force beyond itself.
.60**	-.18	70. God appears or exists in only one correct or true form.
.58**	-.15	72. God (a supernatural being), causes everything to happen.
-.63**	.21	*74. Nature, without any God or gods involved, causes all physical world things, such as the movement of the planets, volcanic eruptions and storms, to happen.
.44**	-.15	75. God causes even bad things, like storms and wars.
.41**	.06	77. Both God and humans cause some good and some bad things to happen.
-.55**	.31*	83. The weather is caused simply by nature, independent of a supernatural being=s influence.
-.67**	.26*	84. Some things, such as clouds, can be beautiful without anybody or a god or God designing them to be the way they are.
.60**	-.13	85. Because a flower is beautiful, God had to design it rather than it developing simply by natural evolution.

Universal religious service endorsement. Regarding frequency of endorsement levels, the percentages of Students and Unitarians who strongly agreed, agreed and half who were neutral is given in the table below.

Student % Endorse	Unit. % End.	Item #	Item content.
22	25	91	Adhere only to one=s own local religion.
78	95	92	Think about the welfare of all others.
71	88	93	Curious about common religious beliefs.
57	93	94	One service per month on universal concern.
61	82	95	Universal service once each month.

Thus, we see a greater proportion of Unitarians endorse the notion of a universal perspective in religious thinking and practices. They strongly endorse the welfare of all humans and the idea of a universal religious service based on common beliefs and practices once per month. This high level of endorsement is as would be expected, based on the principles of this group. A pamphlet they sent me described their Unitarian Universalist philosophy, which accepts members to their faith who are Christian and non-Christian, having tolerance for various specific religious beliefs and believing in a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.®

Discussion.

These findings imply that there is no simple answer as to what religion means to people. At a minimum, one must consider separately persons of the two major types of religious belief orientations, fundamentalist and kindly. A small minority of persons, those of the fundamentalist orientation, seem to use religion as a rather comprehensive intellectual explanation of the world and a system of emotional guidance and reassurance about how to function in it. They seem to prefer unwavering and literal religious scriptural explanations and rules. They are willing to eschew the rather complex findings of science and of the mental health field in preference for simpler religious explanations and help.

In contrast, the majority of persons, close to 90 percent, hold , hold Kindly Religious beliefs, versus about 5 percent who hold Fundamentalist beliefs. The Kindly Beliefs type tend to trust their own judgment (as by reading and meditating) when finding meaning in religion. They do not seek from religion a group-unified, coherent, simple explanation of the world or guidance about how to live in it. They appear to each find their own personal mix of specific beliefs, rituals and activities that give religion meaning for them. And, for them, religion does not have nearly as central or powerful a place in their lives as it does for Fundamentalists. Persons of the Kindly Beliefs type do not eschew science and mental health professions.

Thus, when explaining what religion means to people, one must first specify to which of these two general classes of religious orientation one is referring. Then one can be more specific as to the meanings. And the more empirical research we do, the more accurate and confident we can be in our generalizations on this topic.

The majority of persons appear comfortable with the notion of a universal, “meta religion”, one that can help unite people of different religious faiths around the world.

Implications for Politics.

A specific implication of the above data for politics is insights it provides for

making appeals to voters. If one wishes to appeal to the majority of voters, one can do several things:

1. Explain that there are two basic religious belief types, one that tends to be associated with warmongering and disavowal of human rights and endorsement of positive foreign policy and sustainable programs. Not all fundamentalists hold these other views, but most do. The other religious belief type, the Kindly Beliefs type, is opposite in these political attitudes.
2. Appeal to the group that one=s political party fits.

If one=s political party endorses warmongering and eschews human rights, positive foreign policy and sustainable programs, then it would make sense to seek support from fundamentalists. One can speak in terms of the values of Fundamentalists as reflected in the Religious Values - 51 scale.

If one=s party endorses, peaceful cooperation with other nations, human rights, a positive foreign policy and sustainable policies and programs, then appealing to those of the Kindly Beliefs type would be reasonable. One can speak in terms of thinking for oneself and of respecting other religions. One can refer to the other values definitive of the characteristics of the Kindly Beliefs type and of the traits associated with this type (endorsement of human rights, disavowal of warmongering, etc).

Conclusion.

This initial study clarifies that religion has two separate meanings for two general classes of persons. Fundamentalists seem to value religion as a relatively simple cognitive and emotional “security blanket”, providing clear explanations about the world and about how one should function in it. They seem to think very much alike and tend to be intolerant of those who think differently than they do.

In contrast, for the majority of persons, those of the Kindly Beliefs type, religion has less predictable importance as an explanation of the world and a guide to behavior. For them, religion appears to be a guide of a more flexible, tolerant and eclectic nature. Persons of this type apparently find meaning in religion in many different, individual ways. They are comfortable with and tolerant of the differences between members of their group. They seem relatively more comfortable with uncertainties of life, and with questions about purpose, life and death. They think in a variety of ways about such issues and are tolerant of that variety.

Further studies can explore additional such meanings of religion to various groups of persons. The majority of persons overall endorse the idea of a uniting meta religion. These data have relevance for politics, specifically for targeting and shaping messages to voters.

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